

Flowers in the Soil

by window124

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1. Darkness

"I killed my best friend."

Rick's words broke the night that was as moonless as a tomb. Michonne was bewildered at his words at first, her head resting on his chest, listening to the staccatos of his heart. They were dressed in bed, a first for their new relationship, but neither felt comfortable undressing after their ordeal. The only thing they had shed in collapsing on their bed was their boots and his brown jacket. Neither slept, needing and wanting the silence, their arms tight around the other. Michonne had felt his lips on the crown of her head repeatedly, his gratefulness of having her with him apparent in his wordless way. It was the first words he had spoken in four hours. The first words he spoken since the rushed funeral and burial of their friend.

"Rickâ€|this isn't your fault."

She could feel his breath hitch but didn't turn her body or head to see him cry. Some things were too private and his chest made her head rise and fall. She just squeezed him tighter, letting him know, in their silent way, that she was there for him. That she would always be there for him like he was for her.

Rick sniffed and squeezed her hip. She waited for him to say more, knowing more was on his mind.

"Y'know, in the beginning, I killed my best friend. My first friend."

She had heard of the infamous Shane and was not shocked by his admission. She was shocked about nothing he had to do to survive and from all Andrea had told her about Shane, he was a loose cannon with a short fuse. It did not shock her that Rick would have to put him down in some way. While she heard admiration from Andrea about Shane (and her obvious attraction) in her stories, she knew men like him in the old world too. And they never ended good.

"I haven't thought about Shane in a while." He paused and he took in a deep breath. "It's been awhile."

Michonne felt his fingers playing with her hair and shook off her own feelings of unease. These were Rick's hands. She was safe. She rubbed her cheek against his shirt and soothed his stomach, which had become tight with the retelling of this story. This confession.

"He wanted to steal everything I had. He thought that I was too weak to survive. That I was too weak to take care of Lori and Carl. Take care of Judith. I stabbed him in the heart."

At this she looked up at him, his eyes glassy with tears, his mouth pursed in the effort it too not to cry.

"Maybe he was right."

"Rick!" She didn't want her tone to come out as reprimanding but it did. He slightly flinched as she sat up and glared at him.

"I'm only a failure, Michonne, I failed. I failed you. I failed Maggie. I failed Carl. God, he saw me knell in front of that bastard. I failed Daryl."

Rick swallowed and tears fell down his cheeks. Michonne reached out and wiped his tears, her own tears falling with him. She leaned forward and kissed his lips.

"You didn't fail us. You. Did. Not. Fail. Us. We all had a part, Rick. All of us. Daryl would tell you that."

A cynical bark tore from his throat. "If he was here, but he's not anymore."

"Don't carry that in your heart, Rick. Daryl loved you. He was your brother even in the end."

Rick sat up abruptly and then got out of bed, his back tense, and stood at the window. Michonne checked the baby monitor to see Judith sound asleep, the only one in the community that was having peaceful dreams. Carl was just as bitter as his father and refused to leave the porch, the last place Daryl had slept, and he contemplated the revenge for the man who had killed his friend. Both of her men were in pain and she was unsure how to make this better. If she could make it better.

If Negan was in front of her she would run him through. Just like the Governor. Just like all of her enemies. Kill him and watch him turn like the scum he was. He didn't deserve a clean death. She tucked the thought away for another time and stood behind Rick. She wrapped her arms around him and placed her forehead on his back. Rick stilled, not moving, but then eased into her embrace, putting his hands on top

of hers.

"I don't know what to do, 'Chonne. I haven't been this clueless since I woke up from my coma. I'mâ€|scared."

She knew it took a lot for him to admit this. Rick was a quiet man of pride. He prided himself in taking care of his people. His family. To admit he was at a loss was admitting he was weak. That he wasn't strong. It was the furthest thing from the truth.

Her stomach clenched as she recalled Deanna's words on her deathbed. _May this pain be useful to you._

"I thought I killed my boyfriend."

At this, Rick turned and contemplated her as if he'd never seen her before. But it wasn't out of judgement, just care and concern.

"I didn't literally kill him. Iâ€|knew he was drowning. Mike was always sensitive. That's what I loved about him."

_That's what I love about you. _ She thought to herself. Rick placed his hands on her shoulders, ready to listen. Ready to understand.

"I was so busy trying to survive I didn't realize he needed more. That he needed to feel useful. That there was purpose. I didn't understand his moods. He was like a stranger to me after awhile. All we had in common was Andreâ€|our son."

Rick tilted his head and Michonne turned her gaze to the floor. It was still painful and exposing herself felt raw but necessary. That she needed to. That it was time.

"I thought my inattention cost me my son. I didn't know Mike was on the brink. That he got high to take away his pain. And I blamed myself for that and I punished myself for it. For a long time, I blamed myself for Mike. For Andre. How they died. Then I met you."

Michonne's raised her eyes to see Rick's compassionate ones, his hands tightening on her shoulders. He leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

"I'm so sorry, 'Chonne. So damn sorry."

She felt tears come down her eyes. But she had to finish. He had to understand.

"I was so lost for a long time. And then you and Carlâ€|you changed everything. You help heal that wound. You gave me purpose and thoughts of life again. I realized that I didn't kill Mike or Andre. I forgave myself because I knew that if fate could bring me to you guys then I couldn't have been all bad. You would do anything for us, I know this. And we'll win this."

They put their heads together, closing their eyes. They stood in silence with no moon to caress them with its light.

"I thought I lost you." Rick confessed. "I was so scared. So scared. And what is killing me is that I felt relief that it wasn't you. That

it wasn't Carl. What kind of friend am I?"

This did surprise Michonne and she gazed up at him. She saw his guilt and self-loathing. She held his face in her hands as she were cradling a treasure. She felt like a flower newly planted in the soil, his love, Carl's love feeding her to grow. She needed no sun because he was here and Michonne wanted him to grow too in the beam of her love. Her sun had been dimmed a long time, but the way he closed his eyes and settled into her touch told her it was bright enough. Good enough.

"You are a good friend. Daryl loved you. And we will avenge him. We will."

"Negan won't take what we have."

"Never."

They embraced on a dark night turning slowly into the morning.

2. Comfort

Father Gabriel knew about guilt. If he had any real notion about anything in this world, it would be about the guilt that burned into your soul like a brand that only you knew was there. As he observed Rick Grimes sitting quiet and alone in the church, he knew that Rick was experiencing his own type of brand burning into his soul.

It had been two days since the group that had left for Hilltop had come back without Maggie or Glenn and the body of Daryl Dixon covered in a gray sheet. Rick had been bloody, both from bruises on his face and the blood of his friend covering his clothes and upper body as he carried him inside the church, dazed and confused. Gabriel had dropped his rifle at the side and walked boldly up to the group. He knew a man like Dixon would not want a ceremony or prayers. Neither would Rick or the rest of the group that had come into the vestibule of his sanctuary. What they wanted, what they needed, was for a moment of silence, of togetherness, before they buried their friend. Rick had laid Daryl's body on the floor, only a couple of spaces from where he sat now, and had let out a wail that Gabriel was unsure was even human. A mixture of grief, sadness, and anger that Gabriel knew he would never get out of his head like the congregation he once left out to die.

Gabriel approached him with the thoughtfulness of a cautious mouse now. Rick looked deep in thought, much cleaner and put together than he was before. But that look of shock and weariness still haunted his features.

"Rick."

Rick looked up, his eyes red and tired, and then back down again. Father Gabriel didn't want to presume that he was welcome and was about to move again when he heard Rick's raspy voice.

"Stay."

Father Gabriel nodded and then crossed in front of Rick to sit next

to him on the pew. He then looked at the front of the church and the stain glass windows and waited.

"How'd you do it, Father?"

He turned to see Rick's pained expression and knew what he was talking about immediately. Knew he meant how he got over the guilt. Over his sins.

"I didn't. I still haven't." Father Gabriel expressed, his face pained. "There are still nights I hear them screaming. Asking me for help. Begging me for respite for their torment. And I still have no answer."

Rick was still at this and then leaned back in the pew, biting his lip slightly.

"How do you believe in God? Like after everythingâ€¦how? How does any of this shit make sense?"

Gabriel felt himself amused by the blasphemy. It was a strange world indeed he had to admit.

"We were onceâ€¦not on the friendliest of terms." Gabriel answered which actually earned a small chuckle from the man next to him.

"That's saying it."

"But God led you to my path. Youâ€¦you saved me. I was lost in so many ways. Ways other than physically. You and your peopleâ€¦I didn't understand your savagery. Your lack of mercy. But I found that you were more merciful than I was and in that little way you showed me God's mercy."

Rick turned to him and nodded his head.

"It's hard, Father. Real hard."

"It is. But it is through trial that we learn who we are. This is just another trial, Rick. You have shown us you will be able to pass it."

He heard Rick inhale and then let it out slowly. He then gave a nod of his head and then stood, the weight on his shoulders still heavy from Gabriel could see. Gabe stood and watched him and before Rick touch the door Gabriel shouted the first thing to come to his mind.

"Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Rick paused, his hand on the knob, and he took in a deep breath. He bent his head, turned to Father Gabriel, and gave him a gentle look that seemed to Gabe to contain lifetimes of pain.

"Thank you. Thank you for everything."

Rick Grimes then walked out without looking back.

3. Shadows

Rick Grimes knew that Michonne was concerned. It was the third night in which no sleep would come to him, his mind working a mile a minute trying to figure out how to get his community out of the crisis it found itself in. It was the second night back in ASZ that he decided to leave the bedroom and endless pace in the living room, trying to escape nightmares and his fighting his own demons. He suspected that Michonne knew about the hallucinations that were starting again, visions of friends he'd lost and loved ones but they needed him strong. No time for doubt.

He could feel her as he stood by the window, gazing out at the community that had become his home. A place he never thought would be his home in his last life or this one. He knew she had finally gotten Carl to sleep in his room after days on the porch, Carl's scowl firmly attached to his face as he looked at his father. Rick had heard him earlier talking about how his father was acting like a coward and how Michonne had defended him. Now she was here with him again. She went to the other side of the window and he could feel her warm brown eyes on him, waiting.

"I'm okay."

"You haven't slept in three days. You need to rest. We need you strong."

Rick stayed focused on the street outside the window and the quietness of the town. He could see shadows moving in the dark but didn't react to them. He knew it was in his head. He knew that Daryl was out there, his quietness searing into his soul, accusing him. That Jessie was out there with her children, broken promises in her eyes. Hershel with his kind continence turned vicious with accusation. Shane was there, teasing him and harassing him, his smile going all the way to the gums. Sophia was there lost and alone. And Lori was there, her face sad and bereft. She was holding a baby. Maggie's baby. Someone he had failed who hadn't even made it into the world. Were Morgan and Carol out there too? Were they the other people he failed?

"Hey, we're in here." Rick felt her palm on his cheek and turned to face her finally. "We're all here."

Rick stayed quiet at that and she moved her hand down to his chest and then finally met his own, grasping it.

"Come to bed."

She lead him through the living room and then up the stairs. Rick followed the sway of her hips, the unwavering confidence in her steps, and wondered how she did it. How could she keep it together when he was a mess?

Michonne opened the bedroom door and let him in first and he took in their room. Their room. It was both an exhilaration and a revelation every time he thought of them together, a couple, a unit. Rick went to his side of the bed and sat down, unsure of what to do or how to get to sleep. He was slightly startled when Michonne stood in front

of him, taking off her white button up shirt. It suddenly came to him that she hadn't dressed for bed as she has said she would do earlier in the night.

She was waiting for me.

The thought made his heartache as she removed her bra and he pulled her between his legs, his ear touching her bare stomach. Michonne froze for a minute and then put her fingers through his hair in the way he loved.

"I need you, Rick."

Rick was taken aback by her confession but he blurted out his own confession as he looked up at her face.

"I need you too, 'Chonne."

She leaned down and kissed him, her lips plump and pleasant. Michonne hadn't kissed him this way since the morning before they lost Daryl, when he thought he was invincible. That they were invincible. Now he knew better and kissed her like some fragile thing and she melted in his arms.

_She needs this just as much as me. _ Rick thought as she gently explored his mouth with her tongue, tracing the outline of his with a smooth precision . He moved his hands up and down her back and then moved forward to the front of her jeans, carefully unbuttoning her pants.

If there was one thing he could do it was to please her. Make her feels safe and protected. She had went through the pain too, his memory creating the picture of her with blood over her face and horror in her eyes. Daryl's blood was all over her and when they had went to clean in one of Gregory's rooms at Hilltop, she scrubbed her body as if the blood would never come off. Rick slipped his hand into the front of her pants and inside of her panties and she stopped kissing him long enough to moan her contentment as he played with her clit.

He had found in their short time together that her moans were the sexiest thing he had ever heard on this planet. His usually stoic samurai would break under his touch, become vulnerable and girlish during their love making. It was happening here too as she dug her fingers into his shoulders as he used two fingers to rub over her sweetest spot. Her wetness was becoming apparent as he explored her folds.

"Fuck." was her simple word as he moved his hand to push down her pants, bringing her panties with her. Michonne stepped out of her clothes and then began to help him remove his shirt. Rick wrapped his arms around her waist, rose slightly, and then flipped her onto the bed, their kisses urgent and needy.

Rick's jeans and boxers soon joined hers on the floor as he licked on her neck and sucked on her nipples, his tongue lapping them up and then sucking. He lifted himself to see her fully, to wonder at her below him, and was touched by the tears in her eyes.

"I can'tâ€¦" Michonne grabbed his hair, bringing him closer to her,

and he wanted to drive her tears away. He pushed himself inside of her, biting his lips at the feel of her wet intensity. Michonne's legs wrapped around him as he plunged inside, over and over, not knowing where she started and he stopped. He felt her tug him deeper inside and almost let go, his control barely there.

She was soon on top of him, flipping their places, palms flat on his sweaty chest. Rick sat up and hugged her to him, their breaths intermingling with each thrust. Their foreheads came together, he never felt closer to another human being.

Michonne. My Michonne.

He could feel her shuddering, her climax close, and he was shocked by his own tears at the feel. He'd almost lost her. She'd almost been one of those shadows. He couldn't lose her. He couldn't.

He felt her kiss his tears and then he returned the favor. They kissed urgently as the pace speeded up.

"I love you. I love you, Rick." She whispered in his ear as she shattered. He followed her over the cliff, knowing there was nothing but them in this moment. Them and their love.

They both collapsed, her head on his chest, and Rick went to remove himself from inside her but Michonne stopped him.

"I want you close."

He nodded his head and kissed her forehead. He moved her hair from her face and gazed at her.

"Rick, you have to promise me if you see people...if you see things that aren't there, you need to tell me."

The fear in her voice made everything in him want to destroy the world. Rick nodded his head and she took in a deep breath of relief. He held her closer, his lips near her forehead, and breathed her in.

"I love you. I love you, too" Rick whispered, returning her earlier words and she closed her eyes. He could feel her heartbeat on his body and his member slowly softening inside of her. His eyes were becoming heavier and as he drifted into the first sleep he had since this ordeal had begun he thought of the woman in his arms, the son in the next room, and his baby sleeping peaceful dreams in her crib.

Before the night claimed him he thought of one thing that gave him inspiration and hope.

I have a plan.

4. D

Spencer Monroe did not care he was escaping ASZ in the middle of the night, his rage carried him through the darkness with his flashlight, rifle, and knife. His mother, Deanna, had often chided him that that was his worst habit. That he would get upset and then act rashly. She

warned him that this was even far more dangerous in the new world they found themselves in than in the old world where the worst he could suffer was possibly getting arrested and humiliating his mother. He heard the gurgling of a biter in the distance but didn't care as he maneuvered through the woods with only one thought.

My mother would never give in.

The thought of what Rick had said that night made him want to throw up all over the church where the meeting took place. Rick had said, in so many words, that they were going to be giving these Savivors half of their things. That Negan would be coming in a week's time to take it and that he, as their leader, didn't want to fight back against him. It was the far cry from the man who swaggered out of the same church a couple of days prior, confident that his plan would work in killing the Savivors before they got them. What bullshit.

He came to the spot, the letter D carved in the tree, and kneeled. Spencer laid his flashlight on the ground and sat in the grass, his mind running a hundred miles a minute. Everything his parents had worked for was going up in smoke and he felt impotent to do anything about it. Most of the community was in shock and dismay, but they didn't fight it. Tobin had told him that Rick knew best and if he thought that giving up the supplies would help save the community, he would back him. Tobin always was a dumbass.

Spencer grabbed his knife at the sound of crackling leaves behind him, ready for a fight with the undead, but then eased as he saw another flashlight in the distance. From the walk and the form of a sword in the darkness, he knew it was her. That it was Michonne coming to look for him again.

"Spencer? Spencer, you need to come back."

Spencer took in a deep breath, not wanting to hear her at this moment, not wanting to deal with what she had to say. She had stood up, next to Rick, to convince them it was the right plan. To just give Negan what he wanted. She had no right to come her after she disrespected her mother's memory.

"What I do is no concern of yours." Spencer barked. He glared up at her as she stood in front of him.

"I know you are upset."

"You know nothing about me. About my family. You don't belong here."

The warrior seemed exasperated and frustrated by his obstinance but he didn't care. Even Rosita stood beside Rick. Rosita who seemed like she was willing to fight for everything just simply...gave up. Gave in. The woman he had had feelings for...she gave in too.

"You have to come home. Being out here...doing whatever it is you are doing. Your mother wouldn't want this."

Spencer didn't know how he got to his feet but he did and he towered over Michonne. Her eyes held no fear, only this infuriating concern, a concern of family for family.

"There are a lot of things my mother wouldn't want. She damn sure wouldn't want a group of thugs and criminals taking over our safe haven! But what do you care about that, Michonne? Why don't you go check on that coward of a man you have and see how he wants to bend!"

The finger in his face and the widening of her eyes to deadly aim shut him up. Spencer gulped, not knowing how far he had taken her, and closed his mouth. She may have been smaller than him but he knew, for sure, that she could kill him dead without much effort on her part. And he knew that those brown eyes, hardened and sharpened to lethal purpose, was one of the last things her enemies saw before they perished from the earth.

"Rick is doing the best he can in this situation. You weren't there. You didn't see how many men Negan has. They were at least a hundred deep and armed to the teeth. You didn't see your best friend get murdered in front of you either. Don't say his name out of your mouth unless you know what you are talking about!"

She moved her finger and Spencer felt his anger become a hot coal in his chest. There has to be some way. Some way out of this.

"Maybe we could have negotiated. Maybe!"

Michonne eyes got sadder, more dimmed.

"There is no negotiation with the Savivors. It was always going to be this way."

"So we give up? You have children?" Spencer saw her flinch at this, "You want to take food out of their mouths to feed the Savivors? What happened to your fight?"

"Nothing happened to my fight. But there is a difference between being brave and being stupid and attacking the Savivors or Negan is stupid. He'd kill all of us."

"So we're slaves? We work for them now with no repayment and no end?"

Michonne took in a deep breath and looked away. Spencer backed away from her a couple of steps and then returned to his knees in front of his mother's grave, looking at the D illuminated by his flashlight.

"When we first came to this place it was horrible. We had to fight off biters what felt like day and night while they were erecting the walls. But my mother told us it was worth it. It was worth it to have our own place in the new world. That no matter how impossible it seemed that we would be the guardians of the peace. A beacon to the world."

Spencer eyes glistened with tears and he let his head down.

"I have nothing left of her now."

He felt Michonne hand on his shoulder and the quietness of the night air chill his bones.

5. With or Without You

Michonne was sure she heard incorrectly. It took her a few seconds to replay in her mind the last words that Rick had just said and she was still in disbelief. She saw Jesus, Sasha, Abe, Eugene and Rosita look uncomfortable suddenly, as if they had intruded in a private moment in the middle of their kitchen. Rick had the good sense to look down at the map and instead of at her as her anger and humiliation rose.

"Rick, I think that Michonne would be the most reasonable person for this. You are going to need a lot of firepower and people who know how to fight if you are going for these weapons." Jesus said, his blue eyes looking like an animal who didn't want to get entrapped in a snare. He had arrived earlier in the night sending word of Maggie and Glenn at Hilltop and because he knew that they would need him. "You need as muchâ€¦"

"She needs to be here." Rick said, his shoulders tensing and if Michonne could burn a hole into him at that moment she would. Of all the macho horseshit she had ever heard of this took the cake.

Michonne crossed her arms and the silence became an overwhelming cloud of tension, smothering everyone in its path. Abe cleared his throat and glanced at Sasha. Sasha nodded her head.

"We'll go and get the RV ready for our trip as well as a couple of trucks." Abe suddenly interjected. He, Eugene, Sasha, and Rosita bolted out of the room as if the hounds of hell were after them. Jesus stared at Michonne and then at Rick, unsure of how to proceed, but then he merely did the smart thing.

"I'll try to find more information about where Sanctuary is."

Jesus walk swiftly out of the room and then it was just them, in the morning daylight, and Michonne heated glare at Rick who didn't take his eyes off the map of Washington D.C. in front of him.

"This is foolish. I thought that I had to talk to Carl about locking up his girlfriend in a closet but obviously he gets it from his father."

"Michonne."

"Of all of the pigheaded, stubborn...no, I'm going."

"You need to stay here!" Rick exploded. It was not often that Rick lost his temper with her and she knew that it was more of his fear talking than anything else. But she was going whether he liked it or not.

"You are letting your fear get the best of you. You know I'm one of the best out there. You know that I will get the job done no matter what and you know that I will be the best asset you have. And if you think I'm letting you go into D.C. without me you are sorely mistaken."

Rick finally raised his eyes to her and the pain in them shocked her

and subdued some of her fury. His hands were balled up on top of the map. He was breathing hard, ready to fight her, ready to make her see that she needed to stay but she would not let that happen. It was too dangerous. Too risky and with Daryl gone, Carol missing, and Glenn at Hilltop. He needed her.

"Michonne, I can't go out there and only think about your safety. Think about you getting home." Rick confessed.

"That has never stopped you from letting me do it before."

"It's different now."

"How? Because we are in love? Because we are together?"

"Yes." Rick said simply and put his eyes back on the map. Michonne shook her head. She had hoped that he wouldn't doubt her skills. She was the same Michonne before and after they made love. She would make it back and she would make sure that he made it back too.

She carefully walked over to him and put her hand under his chin so he could look at her and she could look at him.

"Every day I think about stabbing that bastard through the heart and laying his body out for the walkers to eat. I want to be a part of this, Rick. I have to be. With or without you."

Rick startled at that, stepping back and gazing at her with surprise.

"I won't let you do that, Michonne."

"You don't have a choice. The only choice you have is if you let me do it with you or without you. I won't let him hurt you, the kids, or our friends. So if going on this mission and getting those weapons help then that's what I'll do. This isn't all about you, Rick. I need this justice too and if I'm going to lie to these people to keep them safe and thinking they are going to bend to Negan then I need to have some stake in this. A real stake."

Michonne thought of Spencer crying at his mother's grave as she held steady in her beliefs. She had to do this. For not only Rick but for everyone. For herself. Rick rubbed his fingers through his hair in frustration and Michonne held steady against her own warring feeling of hurting him. She loved him but she wasn't going to let him sideline her because of his own fear.

He gazed at her again. "What if I can't protect you?"

Michonne put her chin up. "I can protect myself, Rick. I don't die."

Rick gave her a small smirk at that and rested his hands on his hips. She came closer to him and hugged him to her, rubbing his back up and down and he returned the favor.

"I can't lose you." Rick whispered in her ear.

"You won't. And I won't lose you. Not now and not ever."

He kissed her gently on the lips and nodded his head.

"We head out three hours."

Michonne squeezed him tighter to her and felt his touch returned. She looked to see Carl in the foyer, looking in on them holding Judith, his one good eye curious and seeking. She nodded at him and he nodded back.

Rick released her and pulled back, noticing his son waiting for him, and beckoned him over. Carl moved with Judith, looking unsure about what he was going to hear from his father.

"What's up, Dad?"

Rick gazed at Michonne and then back at Carl. Michonne held her breath and waited for his words.

"Son, we are going to go into D.C. I need for you to help Gabriel keep ASZ safe while we're gone."

End
file.